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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003782

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: EVER VELOZA (HH), OTHER FORMER PARA LEADERS  
CONTINUE JUSTICE AND PEACE TESTIMONIES

REF: A. BOGOTA 2901  
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 3018

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer. Reason: 1.4(b,d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (U) On September 24-25, former AUC (United Self Defense Forces of Colombia) block commander Ever Veloza (aka "HH") continued his voluntary testimony (version libre) under the Justice and Peace Law (JPL). Veloza, who previously acknowledged his complicity in over 3000 murders and whose extradition was suspended by President Uribe for six months to allow him to testify, implicated politicians, military personnel, and businessmen in paramilitary crimes. Over 130 victims in Medellin and via video in Apartado viewed his 7-hour testimony. Other former AUC leaders also continue their testimonies, shedding light on thousands of crimes. So far, 1513 demobilized paramilitaries have given their versions--leading to the exhumation of 1289 remains and information on over 11,500 crimes--have been witnessed by 10,890 victims. End Summary.

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Veloza Recounts Para Murders and crimes  
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[1](#)2. (U) Justice and Interior Minister Fabio Valencia Cossio announced on August 31 that he would suspend the extradition of former paramilitary commander Ever Veloza for six months to allow him to continue his testimony (version libre) under the Justice and Peace Law (JPL). Veloza has acknowledged his complicity in over 3000 murders and personally confessed to over 600 murders. He testified in June that his men paid navy officers to turn off radars to facilitate drug shipments. Veloza also implicated banana industry officials, Valle de Cauca Senator Juan Carlos Martinez, former Cartago (Valle de Cauca) Mayor and current Congressmen Luis Carlos Restrepo Orozco, and former 17th Brigade officials General Rito Alejo and Colonel Byron Carvajal for colluding with paramilitaries.

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Politicians, Military Implicated  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) In a JPL session on September 24, Veloza testified in a small holding room in the Medellin Fiscalia building with his lawyer, key prosecutor Nubiastella Chavez, Medellin Inspector General Plinio Posada Arranceta, three assistant investigators, and a victims representative. His testimony

was broadcast to an adjoining room where over 30 victims watched via a large screen projector. The victims submitted follow up questions on pieces of paper handed to investigators during breaks, with some launching violent outbursts against Veloza. Another 100 victims watched via live satellite feed in Apartado, Cordoba department. Veloza spends most days in isolation at Itagui prison, but receives daily visits from his lawyers as well as thrice-weekly personal visits. .

¶4. (SBU) An emotionless, unrepentant Veloza recounted details of the murders, strangulations, and decapitations of his victims. At times looking relaxed, he took notes and pored through notebooks as the prosecutors posed questions. Veloza identified an unnamed intelligence officer of the 17th brigade in a photo lineup as a collaborator in the San Jose de Apartado massacre and confessed to the killing of two unionists because he believed they were FARC members. He repeated previous testimony implicating former Cauca Governor and Ambassador Juan Jose Chaux of paramilitary ties and accepting paramilitary support for his gubernatorial campaign. He said Colombia was "full of Chauxs." He also alleged that Antioquia businessman Hugo Albeiro Quintero Restrepo and 25 palm growers in Choco had narcotrafficking ties with former AUC commander Vicente Castano. Quintero Restrepo was arrested on September 25 for conspiracy, forced disappearance, and aggravated murder.

¶5. (C) At a separate meeting with head prosecutor Chavez, she explained that the Fiscalia interviewed members of Veloza's Bloque Bananero and Bloque Calima prior to his testimony to develop their lines of questioning. Chavez, who

has been working on the case since Veloza was arrested in April 2007, said the Fiscalia believes it can verify about 80% of his testimony. She speculated that Veloza would likely provide information "drop by drop" or avoid implicating key political figures in an effort to extend his extradition suspension. Veloza claims he was pressured by Casa de Narino spokesman Cesar Velasquez and lawyer Oscar Palacio to keep quiet on implicating politicians, a charge both denied. Chavez said the Fiscalia is investigating this accusation and reviewing protection measures for Veloza and his immediate family.

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Other Former Para Leaders Confess to Crimes  
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¶6. (U) In addition to Veloza, other former paramilitary leaders continue to shed light on their crimes. In September, Jorge Enrique Rios (Sarmiento) of Bloque Central Bolivar confessed to 72 homicides and 52 armed actions in Tumaco (Narino) and El Bagre and Zaragoza (Antioquia). He also testified that his group handed over the remains of two youth--who were recruited and later killed for disobeying orders--to the army in 1998, who then declared them killed in combat. In July, former AUC leader Enrique Banquez confessed to the torture and massacre of 60 villagers in El Salado (Valle de Cauca) in 2000. He also confessed to participating in the massacre of 27 people in Chengue village (Sucre).

¶7. (U) In July, Raul Hasbun (Pedro Bonito) of the Bloque Bananero admitted to training the paramilitaries who participated in the 1997 Mapihipan massacre, ordering a massacre in San Jose de Apartado in 1998, and purchasing 4200 AK47s for his bloque. He compared his killings to "cutting flowers" and said he did not recollect his victims' identities. In September, Manuel de Jesus Piraban (aka "Pirata") admitted to participating in the murders of 17 Patriotic Union (UP) members between 1985 and 1995 in Meta. On October 6, Jorge Ivan Laverde Zapata, commander of the AUC in Norte de Santander, said his men burned over 200 victims' remains in ovens to eliminate evidence.

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Human Rights Group Calls for Suspending Extraditions  
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18. (U) Paramilitary testimonies under the JPL continue to reveal information on previously unsolved crimes as well as the location of remains--belying fears that the GOC's extradition of fifteen paramilitaries last May would undermine the process. Still, Colombian Commission of Jurists President Gustavo Gallon charged that the extraditions remain an obstacle to uncovering the truth about paramilitary crimes. He called on October 1 for the GOC to temporarily suspend the extradition of additional paramilitaries, as well as for the temporary return of the fifteen already extradited. If return is not an option, Gallon said at a minimum the USG and GOC should provide video feeds of confessions to victims here, as was recently done with Salvador Mancuso. So far, 1513 demobilized paramilitaries have given their versions--leading to the exhumation of 1289 remains and information on 11,505 crimes--have been heard by 10,890 victims.

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